

CONFESSION

OF

JOEL CLOUGH,

Who was executed at Mount Holly, N. J. July 26, 1833,

FOR THE

MURDER OF

MRS. MARY HAMILTON,



*Filed
August 10
1833*

WITH HIS LIFE,

WRITTEN BY ONE THAT KNEW HIM;

ALSO HIS LAST SPEECH AT THE GALLOWS,

Taken in short hand by a spectator, with Likeness, and Verses

ON THE DEATH OF MRS. HAMILTON.

NEW-YORK.

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1833.

Mary Clough as a mother

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THE
CONFESSION
OF
JOEL CLOUGH.

"I am," [and with uplifted hands] I declare in the presence of Almighty God—"I am innocent." There was an attachment between Mrs. Hamilton and myself, and we were at the time engaged.—She broke it off. I settled up my business, by her request, and left the place. There has been much said there about my character.—The most desperate part of which is the occurrence in New-York. With regard to Mrs. Hamilton's character I have nothing to say. She was a virtuous and honorable woman, and I loved her. If there is virtue in the Catholic religion I am prepared. I hope Almighty God will have mercy on her soul. I fear she died unprepared. When I left New-York, my mind was greatly depressed. I threatened to take my own life, and she was aware of it. I went to bed that morning, and made up my mind to take my life, and sunk into a swoon, as near as I can recollect. In this situation, Mrs. Hamilton came to my room, I did not call her. She shut the door. I laid on my bed, with my face towards the wall. She said, "Clough, what is the matter." I said I felt very bad, and wished her to give me some laudanum. She asked how much. I said what you please. She gave me some, and said I must get up. (There was a noise in the entry.) I said, if you have any thing to say to me, say it quickly. I put my hand in my pocket, to get the key to give to her—I wished her to possess all that I had. She went out. I went to the door and saw Jane in the entry. I pushed too the door. She peeped through. I was in the act of taking my own life. Had the dirk in my pocket. She came in. I closed the door. I told her I should take my life, and she interfered and put her hand on my shoulder. I told her to go out. I reflected a moment, and after striking her one blow, why did I strike her eleven? Why did I not strike my own heart. I was very weak, and the dirk dropped out of my hand, and I could scarcely get to my bed. I was on the point of taking my own life, if she had stayed out of my room, she would have lived, and I should have been in my grave. I feel that I am entirely innocent of her blood, for I don't recollect what I did. I was lost at the time, settled up my business, after my engagement had broken off, and went to New-York and Albany and returned. I was not myself, and was on the eve of taking my own life. I never called her to my room. She came in voluntarily. Here the court proceeded, and as the Chief Justice was about to pronounce the sentence, he requested him to forbear, and said, if my death is required, I am to suffer. (Here the court proceeded, and he again observed) it is not for myself. I do not fear death—I have already suffered death. The honorable Jury have not been sufficiently enlightened on the subject. There are many things yet wrapp'd in darkness. I knew nothing of Mrs. Hamilton coming into my room. There are things stated, as regards my character while in Connecticut, I think it my duty to contradict.

I was appointed, on recommendation of Mr. Mallary, of New-York, superintendent on the Farmington aqueduct, where Hopkins was employed as engineer. I considered myself master of my trade; and I soon discovered that he was incompetent to take charge of that magnitude. Under my influence, after a violent personal quarrel, he was removed from that part of the line,

and always entertained animosity towards me, and thought when he saw me confined in this box, it was a proper time to show his hatred and malignity. I feel that I am not guilty. I do not fear death, but fear that I am not prepared. (Here the court proceeded, and pronounced the sentence of the law.)

Joel Clough is the son of a respectable farmer in New Hampshire, who has been dead several years. He was an Irishman, who settled in New Hampshire in the infancy of that country. His fourth son, Joel, was ever a wild, headstrong undutiful boy, whose self-willed propensities, and ungoverned passions, led him into so many difficulties, that his parents often expressed their apprehensions of his dying an untimely death. As he advanced towards maturity, his father died, and his mother: unable to controul him, left him to pursue his own course, till she was reduced to rather embarrassed circumstances, when an elder son interfered, and secured their aged parent from being further injured by Joel. He then embarked on the world's vast tide, to sink or swim alone. But the variations of his fortune would be tiresome to the reader, and uninteresting to society: suffice it to say, he has seen all the variety of life incident to dissipated men, without friends or fortune. The school system of New England early insured him the rudiments of a genteel education. He had a fine ear for music, and the winter singing-schools had given him a slight knowledge of the scientific part of that art. A short time past in youth, with a stone mason, had instructed him in the rougher parts of that trade, and it is represented that he worked at it in the interior of New-York state. How Mr. Mallery had influence sufficient to recommend him to so trustworthy a situation as he had on the Morris Canal, is enigmatical, as his situation in the city of New-York was at best rather equivocal, and his resources for living scant and unknown. Few who stood forward as his friends seemed to know more of him than his boyhood and his residence at Mrs. Longstreth's, after his engagements at the canal had given him some claim to respectability. "His language," says a gentleman who conversed with him in M. H., "was coarse. His ideas low, and profane, and such as might be expected from a man whose habits had been formed amidst brothels, gambling-houses, and taverns." Such was the society he was connected with, till recommended by a Mr. M—— to the Canal Committee. From that period, his ideas soared to genteelity and polished society: to this, his residence in the respectable house of Mrs. Longstreth seemed a prelude. Could he have married Mrs. Hamilton, her standing in society, combined with his name, might have brought him forward, and he might have become a valuable member, but her cultivated mind, pure heart and unsophisticated manners, was disgusted by his pretences, and her judgment assured her, that in such a union misery would be her fate. Hence her informed mind and heart recoiled from him with trembling disgust. "I could not, mother, dear mother, I could not marry him."—These were her dying words, and the sentiments of her pure heart;—yet for this he slew her.

During his contract on the rail road, suspicion marked his course. His coadjutor, Mr. Shippen, was not easily duped, and detection would soon have followed, had Mr. S have persevered. A depraved man can no more

support an appearance of virtue and integrity long, than he can wear a mask through life. It is religion only can purify the heart after its corruption in the sinks of vice which Clough frequented in New-York, previous to his engagement on the canal. His last visit to that city is only a miniature picture of his former actions.

Fire love hath bound the lion
With a silken thread—

Could Mrs. H. ever have listened to a tale of love with complacency from the lips of a man fresh from the pestilential stoves?—impossible. He well knew that, and, coward like, determined on her murder, which he perpetrated, but could not kill himself,—his coward soul shrunk affrighted from the dirk yet reeking with the heart's blood of her he loved: and it remains with justice and the offended laws of his country, to avenge the innocent blood on the head of her murderer.

CLOUGH'S LAST SPEECH.

Let all persons who now view my untimely death, take warning by my untimely doom, and learn to control their passions, or, like mine, they will become their masters. Oh! my crime is intolerable! Gracious heaven, can thy never failing mercy pardon a wretch whose hands are dyed with the life's blood of the being on earth he loved best? Loved—I adored her—I murdered her! What fiend impelled me to the act, I know not. An exile from my family, I wandered far alone in this vast wilderness. No congenial mind met mine, till I became a resident in Mrs. Longstreth's family. It was there I first beheld her amiable daughter, Mary Hamilton; and while her widow'd heart was bleeding with grief, and her eyes flowing with tears for the loss of her husband, my heart imbibed that impression, that caused her foul murder, and my justly merited death! Oh, God! and did this vile hand dare to deface with brutal rage, that bosom, on which I fondly hoped to rest? Have I robbed the woman I loved, of life? Her mother, my venerated friend of her child, the innocent talented darling of her only charming parent. Her sisters, of that fraternal affection with which her heart overflowed, for them and society, of one of its brightest ornaments. My only parent of her—— But old! there nature no more—freely have I lived, basely have I acted by Mrs. Longstreth's family. And justly am I sentenced to the death I merit.

Angelic Mary, ah! farewell!

You will with angels, I with devils dwell.

LINES ON THE DEATH OF MRS. M. HAMILTON. [BY A LADY.]

Injured excellence, farewell,
Thy spirit doth with angels dwell;
Before that God whom you adore,
You will joyful live forever more:—
Thy spirit, when from realms of bliss,
Shall view the friends you've left in this,
And take a guardian angel's care
Of thy bereav'd infant young and fair.
May death thy earthly parent spare,
To guard thy child with mother's care:
May'n shed o'er her breast its peace divine,
And shield her with its care benign.

EXECUTION OF JOEL CLOUGH.

Yesterday was the day appointed by the authorities of New Jersey for the execution of Joel Clough for the murder of Mrs. Mary Hamilton. The extraordinary atrocity of the act, and the circumstances attending the trial, and the recent escape of the murderer, had given more than common interest to the execution; and at an early hour in the morning of yesterday, the streets of Mount Holly, were crowded with persons who had come to witness the end of the unfortunate man.

The Rev. Mr. Wilner, and one or two religious laymen, were with Clough all the night previous to his death. He attended to their instructions until about midnight, and then lay down and slept composed for about three hours. About 20 minutes past (noon,) the Sheriff brought the culprit from the prison. He was attended by the Rt. Rev. Bishop Doane, Rev. Mr. Wilmer, and several other clergymen. He was placed in an open dearborn, in which were the sheriff and the clergymen, and conveyed to the place of execution, about two and a half miles from Mount Holly near Rancocus bridge. The prisoner was dressed in a white roundabout, vest and pantaloons; his breast was open, and in going to the place of execution, he requested one of the clergymen to place a handkerchief over his neck and breast to protect it from the sun.

Five volunteer companies of infantry were stationed round the gallows, and a company of cavalry attended the culprit from the prison to the place of execution. Clough seemed through the whole of the painful ceremony, to be calm and collected; he had manifested a spirit of repentance while in prison, and had received the rite of baptism, administered by Bishop Doane.

About twenty minutes past one o'clock, the prisoner arrived at the place of execution; he descended from the dearborn without assistance, and having taken leave of several persons whom he recognized, he ascended the platform and sat down in a chair. Bishop Doane, and Mr. Wilmer, of the Episcopal Church; and Mr. Ashton, of Philadelphia, and Mr. Shepherd, of Mount Holly, of the Baptist Church; and the Methodist clergyman of Pemberton, also went upon the platform. The appropriate service was read by Bishop Doane, and a prayer was made by Mr. Wilmer.—Bishop Doane then read a letter from Clough to his mother, and also the confession of the prisoner. Several hymns were sung, and subsequently there was sung the hymn, commencing,

When I can read my title clear,
To mansions in the skies,
I'll bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.

During the whole of these solemn performances, Clough evinced much agitation, frequently arising from his chair, moving about, wringing his hands, &c. He took a solemn and affectionate leave of the clergymen who attended him, about a quarter past two o'clock. The sheriff then adjusted the rope, in which he was aided by Clough. After the rope was placed over the gallows, Clough desired that it might be taken down—he then measured with his arm the length of rope necessary to allow him sufficient fall, and after some other regulations, in all of which the prisoner seemed to take an active part, his arms was pinioned, and the white cap placed on his head, and drawn over his face. In this position he stood a few minutes, when the sheriff struck down the support of the platform, and Joel Clough was launched into eternity. A slight muscular convulsion was all the movement visible in the

body while it was suspended. In about thirty minutes after the execution, the body was taken down and placed in a coffin.

Notwithstanding the immense number of persons assembled, nearly twelve thousand, there was no disorder to mar the solemnities of the occasion.

The CONFES-ION of Mr. Clough, written by himself, and read from the scaffold to the surrounding multitude, in a remarkably distinct, and impressive manner, by Bishop Doane, embodied a brief outline of his life, from his infancy, to the period of his imprisonment. In reference to the crime, for which he has suffered, he made some disclosures, which place the subject in a different light from that in which it has been heretofore viewed. He states, (after appealing to that God before whom he was to appear, for the sincerity of his story,) that Mrs. Hamilton had made an engagement of marriage with him. She subsequently manifested a change, and eventually declared it impossible for her to fulfil her promise, and in various ways showed that her affections had cooled. He was exceedingly hurt and irritated by her conduct, and declares that his object in visiting New-York, was to withdraw himself from her society; that after having been, while there, led into some discreditable scenes, which he looked upon as completing his disgrace, he returned to Bordentown, saw Mrs. Hamilton, and informed her of his misfortunes. On learning that he had lost his money, she offered to give him all the money she had in her possession, and in addition to give him her gold watch. These offers he declined, but renewed the subject of their engagement, and told her that if she would consent to be his wife, all would be well, and they should be happy. She refused, he says, to give him any encouragement, and in a manner calculated to wound his feelings.

From that time, he observes, the idea of destroying her entered his mind. He acknowledges that her death was premeditated; that his intention was to destroy her, and then to commit suicide. From the declarations which he had made to Mrs. Hamilton, she had reason to suppose that he intended to destroy himself; and it was from a feeling of anxiety, arising from her apprehensions on his account, that she probably entered his room on the day of the fatal murder. He says he did not call her. She came in of her own accord.

When he saw her, he advised her, for her own safety to leave the room. She did so, but immediately returned. On her second entrance, he had left the bed on which he had been lying, and was on the opposite side of the room. He was faint, and she observing he looked ill, went to him and offered to assist him to the bed. While doing this, and while his left hand rested upon her shoulder, he drew the dagger, which was concealed about his person, and gave her a severe stab. At this instant, consciousness forsook him, and he repeated the stabs with great violence. He was actuated by jealousy, pride and revenge.

It was his determination that if she would not be his, she should never be another's. The love which was at first pure and ardent, became changed at times to a feeling of hatred.

The trial, he says, was fair and impartially conducted, and he is aware that the verdict and sentence were perfectly just.

That the sight of her, and the idea that she was lost to him forever, but that he might live to see her in the arms of another, drove him to phrenzy, which armed him with resolution sufficient to strike the deadly blow, that would, he fancied, emancipate him from all his sufferings in this world. Impelled by this wild fancy, he seized the fatal steel, and would perhaps have plunged it in his own bosom, had she not have re entered his room at the moment that, under the raging agonies of self-accusation, for time, reputation,

and money misspent, reason had forsook her throne, and passion's conflict tore his heart to agony—when like the raging lion seeking whom he might devour, he beheld the fair, but fickle, cause of all his misery, and viewing her through the green glare of prejudice, tinctured with jealousy, determined she should accompany him to that bourne, from whence no traveller ever return. Thus raging with passion, he seized his victim, and the first plunge of the dagger sealed her doom, by entering that heart he once fervently hoped was his own; from that moment memory failed—revenge was satiated—madness predominated, and idiot like he continued to pierce the bosom he loved; but nature had exhausted all her powers, his strength failed, or the same dagger would have united their heart's blood in death, that reason and judgment had divided in life. From the time she was torn from his arms, he became nearly insensible, and really continued in an idiot like state of stupefaction, till after sentence of death was passed on him; from that time, a strong desire to live predominated in his bosom, and every art was practised to effect an escape, but in vain; at three o'clock he ascended the fatal tree; a l m, and apparently resigned, he shook hands with some of the people round him, and in a few minutes, his frail existence terminated.

Report says, he has relations living in the State of New-York; if so, they must be totally callous to the feelings of nature; for they never visited him in his hours of tribulation and death; to strangers was his body resigned, and by them interred in a decent grave, not far from the place of execution.





A
CORRECT LIKENESS
OF
THE UNFORTUNATE
JOEL CLOUGH.

[COPIED FROM A MINIATURE SENT TO HIS MOTHER WHILE UNDER SENTENCE
OF DEATH.]



Ill fated man, who mourns thy doom?
Thus early hasten'd to the tomb,
Through passion's rage without control,
You sold your life—perhaps your soul.

Why, madman, why deface that breast,
On which you fondly hoped to rest;
Controll'd by time, and reason's power,
Passion would have had it's one short hour.

But now what is the dire event?
Your untimely fate none can lament!
While all doth for thy victim sigh,
For thee no tear drops dims the eye.

How fatal's passion unrestrained,
Like a raging lion, wild, untamed;
You have done a deed at which all shudder,
How dread the crime of wilful murder.